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ABSTRACT

Educational reform efforts have increasingly focused on students at risk of school failure. Educational reform in the 1990s shows a trend toward large-scale restructuring of schools. This document explores the relationship between reform-restructuring schools, and improving educational outcomes for students at risk. Two main questions are posed: Do the types of changes proposed for restructuring schools promise to benefit all students? and What aspects of restructuring are compatible with what we know about educating at-risk students? After reviewing the impact of educational reform on students at risk, recent educational reform is traced from a focus on excellence to one that includes disadvantaged and low achieving populations. An emerging consensus of how schooling is best designed for at risk students is described as raising expectations for all students, responding to student diversity, and building response integrated support. The following three dimensions of restructuring are identified and their potential effect on students at-risk is discussed: (1) changes in school governance, management and leadership; (2) changes in connections with the community; and (3) changes in the process of schooling. (81 references) (Author/LAP)

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STUDENTS AT RISK PROGRAM

Far West Laboratory for
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The Students At Risk Program at Far West Laboratory is one of four field services programs designed to serve the region comprised of Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah. The program focuses on improving the educational opportunities of students who are least likely to attain their full educational potential.

School districts, universities, state departments of education, and other agencies use our resources, technical assistance, and reports to improve and extend existing programs or to design and initiate new ones. Current research and development activities address issues such as the organization of schools for students at risk, the setup and delivery of programs for potential dropouts, involvement of the private sector in education, and the coordination of special services for low-achieving students.

The Students At Risk Program maintains a Regional Resource Center (RRC) which monitors regional needs and resources, disseminates information and products, makes referrals to other agencies, and provides technical assistance. With a collection of over 900 reports and documents, the RRC provides summaries of recent reports and research, identifies and disseminates information on promising approaches and programs for high-risk students, acts as a broker between agencies in the region and nationally, and provides technical assistance on program development and evaluation.

The Students At Risk Program also coordinates the work of the National Network of Regional Educational Laboratories on the theme *Kids At Risk*. As part of this collaboration, the laboratories exchange information on products and programs and co-sponsor conferences. This work enhances the efforts of all the laboratories to provide services for at-risk students in their respective regions.

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School Improvement for Students At Risk

Larry F. Guthrie

1991

ABSTRACT

Students at risk of school failure have become more and more the focus of recent educational reform efforts; in fact, the priority for educating students at risk is higher than ever before. In addition, a consensus about effective strategies for educating students at risk is emerging. A second major feature of educational reform in the 1990s is the trend toward large-scale restructuring of schools. Educators are coming to realize that the present organizational structures no long apply.

This paper explores the relationships between these two areas of reform–restructuring schools and improving educational outcomes for students at risk. It asks whether the types of changes proposed for restructuring schools promise to benefit all students. What aspects of restructuring are compatible with what we know about educating at-risk students?

The paper begins with a review of the impact of educational reform on students at risk, tracing recent educational reform from a focus on excellence to one that includes disadvantaged and low-achieving populations. Next, it describes an emerging consensus of how schooling is best designed for at-risk students that has three aspects: raising expectations for all students; responding to student diversity; and building responsive, integrated support. Three dimensions of restructuring are identified and their potential effect on students at risk is discussed. These three areas are (1) changes in school governance, management, and leadership; (2) changes in connections with the community; and (3) changes in the process of schooling.

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INTRODUCTION

Although students at risk of school failure were largely missing from the reform agenda of the early eighties (Cuban, 1990; Kirst, 1990), they have become more and more the focus of recent educational reform efforts; in fact, the priority for educating students at risk is higher than ever before. The National Goals for Education and the President's plan for achieving them, AMERICA 2000, reflect widespread agreement that, as a nation, we can no longer be satisfied with educating only a small portion of our population.

At the same time, a consensus about effective strategies for educating students at risk is emerging. Several recent trends indicate a shift away from traditional remedial programs–that isolate and underestimate the potential of at-risk students–to more comprehensive approaches with higher expectations for all students.

A second major feature of educational reform in the 1990s is the trend toward large-scale restructuring of schools. Educators are coming to realize that the organizational structures established several decades ago no longer apply. American students, their families and communities, the goals of education, and the demands placed upon educators are dramatically different.

This paper explores the relationships between these two areas of educational reform–restructuring schools and improving outcomes for the educationally disadvantaged. Do the types of changes suggested proposed for restructuring schools promise to benefit all students? What aspects of restructuring are compatible with what we know about educating at-risk students? First, I review and clarify critical issues related to the impact of educational reform on students at risk, tracing recent educational reform from a focus on excellence to one that includes disadvantaged and low-achieving populations. Next, I describe elements of an emerging consensus on how schooling is best designed for at-risk students: raising expectations for all students; responding to diversity; and building comprehensive, integrated support. Finally, I explore ways in which recent proposals for restructuring schools might be expected to benefit those students most at risk.

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INCREASED PRIORITY FOR EDUCATING DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN

The abject conditions and dismal outcomes for students who receive their education in inner-city and poor rural schools are well-documented (Applebee, Langer, & Mullis, 1986; Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1988; Committee for Economic Development [CED], 1985, 1987; Levin, 1986; National Governor's Association, 1986; Powell, Farrar, & Cohen, 1985; Youth and America's Future: The William T. Grant Foundation Commission on Work, Family, and Citizenship, 1988). American leadership has come to recognize that we simply cannot afford the drain on resources that school dropouts and undereducated graduates represent. Only a few years ago, advocates for educational reform were focused on achieving excellence in our schools, but now, virtually the entire spectrum of educational commentators sees success for all children as a priority.

The case for providing a better education for students at risk rests on three basic arguments. First, the national economy will increasingly depend upon an educated work force for its health (Reich, 1990). Moreover, demographic projections show minority workers and women occupying a ever larger portion of the work force (Hodgkinson, 1991). Second, American competitiveness in a global marketplace will also depend upon the ability of our high school and college graduates to efficiently design and produce high-quality goods. Third, the deterioration of American cities and increases in crime, substance abuse, and poverty can in part be attributed to a decline in the educational level and economic status of the nation's youth. Educationally disadvantaged children are no longer confined to a few urban ghetto schools, but are now part of mainstream America. Indeed, the factors that put children at a disadvantage have spread to every community: poverty, limited English proficiency, family structure, low parent education, substance abuse, and crime (National Center for Education Statistics, 1990). The diversity among America's children and their needs further underscores the demand for serving at-risk children (Natriello, McDill, & Pallas, 1990).

Educational reform reflects the increased priority for at-risk students in the directions it has taken. At the federal level, the responsibility for disadvantaged children has extended beyond special programs like Chapter 1 and Head Start. In several ways, the National Education Goals also stress improving outcomes for

all children. All young children will be prepared for entering school, school completion rates will rise to 90 percent; all children will acquire academic competency and responsible citizenship; and every school will provide a safe, drug-free environment for learning (U.S. Department of Education, 1991).

In addition, the network of regional educational laboratories and research centers has as a special priority the education of at-risk children. The emphasis on program improvement and grade-level performance for students in the new Chapter 1 regulations is a further indication of the Education Department's priorities.

States are also meeting this issue head-on, creating the conditions for major revisions in the educational system, rather than simply relying on legislative decree. Instead of only regulating, states are assisting and directing improvement efforts in local districts and schools. Several have allocated scarce education dollars to state compensatory, dropout prevention, and other programs for at-risk students–a shift in focus from the regulatory frenzy that followed the publication of *A Nation At Risk* (Timar & Kirp, 1989). California's new initiative, the Every Student Succeeds program, with its emphasis on a quality curriculum and coordinated services for students, illustrates the kind of action some states are taking.

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EDUCATIONAL REFORM AND STUDENTS AT RISK

Many studies have documented the conditions of schooling for disadvantaged students (Birman et al., 1987; Natriello et al., 1990; Powell et al., 1985; Sedlak, Wheeler, Pullin, & Cusick, 1986; Wehlage, Rutter, Smith, Lesko, & Fernandez, 1989). The "Chapter 1 Whole Day Study," for example, detailed the experiences of at-risk children over an entire instructional day (Rowan & L.F. Guthrie, 1989; Rowan, L.F. Guthrie, Lee, & G.P. Guthrie, 1986). The study described the low expectations, slower-paced curriculum, worksheet-driven instruction, and fragmented schedules that tend to isolate students from the regular program of study and actually put them more at risk.

Traditional approaches to educating disadvantaged children rely upon a set of specialized programs that treat individual needs one at a time–Chapter 1 reading and math, special education, English as a second language (ESL), teenage parenting, and dropout prevention. If students fall behind in math, they are drilled on discrete skills using a separate curriculum. If they enter school with limited English proficiency, they are placed in separate bilingual program or attend ESL classes for most of the day. An underlying assumption of this program approach is that the children need to change–but not the system.

Unfortunately, this piecemeal approach has been largely ineffective, and the gap between less-advantaged and successful learners persists. Despite huge investments of time, energy, and resources over the past 25 years, we still do not appear to be making a significant difference in the education of students at risk of school failure (e.g., Birman et al., 1987).

As evidence against the conventional strategies has mounted, a consensus has begun to emerge among policymakers, educational researchers, school practitioners, and others about the most effective ways of providing an education for students at risk (e.g., L.F. Guthrie, 1991; L.F. Guthrie & Hale, 1990; Knapp & Turnbull, 1990). The recommendations of educational reformers specifically seeking to improve the educational outcomes for at-risk students have converged around three major themes: (1) raising expectations; (2) responding to diversity; and (3) building comprehensive, integrated support. These three themes comprise the essential components of effective schooling for students at risk and

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are, incidentally, not unlike those made by restructuring advocates (e.g., National Governors' Association, 1987; Shanker, 1990).

Raising Expectations

Educational reform has several dimensions. On one level are state and local policies, regulations, and initiatives that tend to set the direction for reform. At another level is the implementation of these and other new strategies and programs in actual schools and districts. A third dimension of reform, posited by Timar & Kirp (1989), is the reform "conversation," or *zeitgeist*–an indicator of the issues of current interest to educational practitioners. What elements of reform are teachers and school administrators talking about? What topics are emphasized at their professional meetings?

Part of the current *zeitgeist* is that we should expect all students to acquire sophisticated problem-solving skills. In fact, it is not uncommon to hear educational theorists, policymakers, and practitioners each declare that "all kids can learn." What was radical talk not so many years ago, is now simply part of educational lore. Programs incorporate the concept into their names (Success for All, Every Student Succeeds); books have titles like *School Success for Students at Risk* (The Council of Chief State School Officers, 1988); and when Chapter 1 legislation challenges schools to help *every* student achieve grade-level performance in the district's regular program, teachers take notice. Although the notion that all students can learn is not a new one (see Bruner, 1960), the concept seems to have only recently caught on among educators at all levels.

The new state and federal policies and programs also reflect assumptions about higher expectations for students at risk. Take, for example, the trend toward alternative assessments. Several states are experimenting with new assessment programs that will replace (or supplement) multiple-choice, norm-referenced tests (Maeroff, 1991). Much of the rhetoric for these changes is couched in terms of assessing what at-risk students "really" know. Portfolios and other "exhibitions," it is argued, will more fairly reflect what all children have learned and can do.

Although related, the concepts of high "expectations" and "standards" are not equivalent. In the flurry of reform responses of the mid-eighties, over 40 states raised course and graduation requirements (Kirst, 1990), but these kinds of higher standards do not necessarily translate into higher expectations for all

students. In fact, many education analysts expected the increased graduation requirements to drive low-achievers out. While there is no clear evidence that this actually happened on a large scale (Natriello et al., 1990), the responses of certain schools were designed to short-circuit the intent of the new regulations. For example, a high school in California simply stretched its remedial science course to two semesters so that lower-track students could meet new graduation requirements (L.F. Guthrie & Leventhal, 1985). In this case, a response based upon high expectations would have provided additional instructional support, or offered alternative routes to students who failed to meet those standards initially–in order that they might have a reasonable chance of reaching them eventually. Otherwise, the raised standards simply result in another set of sorting mechanisms.

Responding to Diversity

A second major trend in educating at-risk students is toward providing services that respond to students' needs, rather than expecting students to match the system's demands. Generally speaking, "more responsive services" means providing alternatives to students in terms of curriculum, instructional strategies, or the way in which the educational program is structured. Schools may offer a specialized curriculum (e.g., related to a particular career area), alternative schedules, classes in different locations, or reduce program size to accommodate student diversity.

The discontinuities between home and school for poor and minority children have engendered a long discussion around cultural and linguistic deficits, cultural difference, and the like (L.F. Guthrie & Hall, 1983). At last, recommendations for remediating the educational and cultural deficits in poor and minority families have been widely rejected, and the responsibility for school failure is shifting to the institutions. It is now up to schools to meet the needs of children and not the other way around. Because some students' out-of-school experiences do not promote acquisition of the decontextualized skills called for in classrooms (Delpit, 1988), changes in the instructional program may be necessary.

Natriello et al. (1990) describe ways that flexible programs and rules will enable schools to respond more appropriately to the diversity of students. Alternative schedules and locations for learning enable instructors to meet varied student needs. For staff, flexible schedules should include time for planning,

discussion, staff training, and curriculum development. Time is an important resource, and should be capitalized upon as well (Natriello et al., 1990).

Building Comprehensive, Integrated Support

A third theme growing out of recent reform is that services for at-risk students need to be comprehensive. The piecemeal, single-issue programs that proliferate among so many schools are being discarded in favor of approaches that make educating disadvantaged children an integral part of the regular school program. However, accomplishing this will require a radical change in the design of schooling. Schools are not currently organized in ways that foster the types of approaches for at-risk students described above. Categorical funding streams, for instance, compartmentalize students and responsibilities across staff members. In this way, the regular classroom teachers begin to think of Chapter 1, special education, and other groups of students as "belonging" to the instructors in their respective programs. Other administrative fixtures such as set hours and rigid schedules further alienate disadvantaged children from school.

Taking a more comprehensive approach to serving at-risk children means putting aside the "project mentality" that created add-ons and looking closely at each student's regular program of study. Despite their prevalence in American schools, federal programs like Chapter 1 actually account for only a small portion of a student's instructional day (Rowan & L.F. Guthrie, 1989). Thus, unless improvements affect the student's overall school program, merely upgrading Chapter 1 lessons, or adding a dropout prevention program here and a counseling hour there, will remain largely peripheral activities. Similarly, research has begun to show that for successful dropout prevention, schools must integrate academic and affective components in the education of at-risk students (L.F. Guthrie, Long, & G.P. Guthrie, 1989; Wehlage et al., 1989). Disaffected students do not simply need to become academically involved, or to feel someone in the school cares about them; they need both.

Similarly, connections with social service and other community agencies need to be established. For large numbers of at-risk children, physical, social, and emotional needs can outweigh the educational opportunities the school can provide (L.F. Guthrie & Scott, 1991). Despite the wide range of services available, the agencies that provide them are just as fragmented as the within-school categorical programs (Kirst & McLaughlin, 1989).

"Comprehensive" programs for students at risk can take several forms, ranging from demonstration programs like Slavin's Success For All (Slavin, Madden, & Karweit, 1989), which coordinates several instructional services, to the Comer process (Comer, 1988), with its emphasis on community involvement. Other programs (L.F. Guthrie & Scott, 1991; Kirst & McLaughlin, 1989) focus on integration of social services. Although each of these programs can in a certain sense be considered "comprehensive," they employ very different strategies. The key ingredients, however, appear to be a broadened view of the child's needs and resources and a set of instructional and support services that stretch across the day and beyond the school.

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RESTRUCTURING SCHOOLS FOR STUDENTS AT RISK

The trend in educational reform toward "restructuring" represents an important avenue through which better schooling for students at risk might be achieved. Restructuring, however, has taken several forms, and means different things to different people. Site-based management, shared decision-making, flexible scheduling, school choice, extended school days, interagency collaboration, and decentralized administration all parade under the guise of "restructuring." How do they fit together under the same concept? And what promise do they hold for students at risk?

The argument for restructuring rests for the most part on the fact that America's schools have reached a point where minor changes, or improvements to the current system will be inadequate. Changes must be "fundamental" and "systemic." In making their case, some point to the fairly dismal record of American schoolchildren in the past 25 years (Ravitch & Finn, 1987); others refer to the outdated "factory model" of schooling in which students are processed, as on an assembly line (Fiske, 1991; Shanker, 1990). Still others cite the increasing diversity of students and the way they learn (Natriello et al., 1990; Shanker, 1990), or the heavily bureaucratized system of public education (Finn, 1991). So, while the *degree* of change is clear, the reasons for it are as diverse as the proposals for modifying schools.

To further confound the issue, there is even discrepancy about the goals of restructuring. Although Newmann (1991) and others are convinced that increasing student achievement is the "ultimate goal of school restructuring," the professionalism of teachers, site-based management, school choice, or alternative assessment appear to dominate the thinking of some (see, for example, Barth, 1990; Chubb & Moe, 1991). Cohen (1988) dismisses these as means to an end. Similarly, Hawley (1990) cites examples from private industry as he questions whether improvements in the autonomy and professionalism of teachers can realistically be expected to result in increased educational productivity. They might only raise teacher morale and job satisfaction, he contends. We must be careful, therefore, not to let interim goals overshadow the basic reason for school improvement: increased student learning.

Such a fuzzy concept as "restructuring" invites clarification, and several attempts at definitions of restructuring have been offered. Elmore (1990), for example, has identified three dimensions of restructuring, (1) changes in school governance, management, and leadership; (2) changes in the "core technology of schooling," such as curriculum and instruction; and (3) changes in the working conditions and professional lives of educators, including the decision-making systems. Newmann (1991) proposed a similar framework for the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools, but he added another dimension, (4) coordination of community resources.

The focus of this discussion is on how restructuring can improve the educational experiences of students who are not succeeding within the current system. In particular, we are concerned with whether or not organizational changes like those suggested in the restructuring literature do, in fact, hold promise for at-risk students. To explore this topic, I have built on the typologies of Elmore and Newmann and divided the discussion into three broad areas of change: (1) changes in school governance, management, and leadership; (2) changes in connections with the community; and (3) changes in the process of schooling.

CHANGES IN SCHOOL GOVERNANCE, MANAGEMENT, AND LEADERSHIP

The dimension of school governance, management, and leadership refers to changes that alter the power relationships within the school, decision-making procedures, and create new responsibilities for staff. Decision-making is decentralized so that school site staff, rather than district administration, make their own choices about staffing, curriculum, scheduling, and budget. Within each school, administrative committees or teams, "lead teachers," and specialists assume much of the responsibility traditionally left to the principal. The key assumption of decentralized decision-making is that better decisions will be made if those closest to the classroom are responsible for making them. Giving teachers more responsibility, the argument goes, will result in more appropriate classroom structures and alternatives for students.

In order for changes in leadership and governance to have a positive effect on the schooling of at-risk students, four criteria must be met. First, the power to make substantive decisions about staffing, budget, and the school's educational program has to devolve from the district. Regardless of whether the decision to

decentralize power comes from the top, as in Dade County or Kentucky (Fiske, 1991), or is initiated by the schools or the community, as in New York's District 4 (Goldberg, 1990), the responsibilities shifted to the school must be real, and not just window-dressing.

Second, decision-making at the school site must be shared. If authority is merely transferred from the district to the principal, or, if the school site council is only an advisory group, rather than the decision-makers, then those closest to action are still out of the decision making loop. For example, the effective schools movement, which attempted to stimulate change within schools using a specific set of characteristics, often failed to involve staff other than the principal or a small school improvement team (Raywid, 1990). Similarly, new school site councils or other administrative units in restructuring schools run the risk of becoming one among several projects within the school (Raywid, 1990; Timar, 1990). On the other hand, if decision-making is truly shared, then all students can benefit. One result, for example, might be more comprehensive support for educationally disadvantaged children. As teachers and other staff become less isolated, compartmentalization begins to break down, and they are able to develop an instructional program that cuts across classrooms, disciplines, and class periods.

Third, those with decision-making authority at the school have to make the kinds of decisions that will have positive outcomes for students at risk. As Hawley (1990) has pointed out, it is not clear yet whether any variety of restructuring will positively affect student learning. In other words, decentralized power alone will not ensure that the expectations for all students are high, that the school program responds to student diversity, or that a comprehensive set of educational experiences are offered to at-risk students. These are the same school staff who have been providing disadvantaged children the low-level curriculum, narrow set of instructional strategies, and fragmented schedules criticized earlier. Why should giving them more authority make them change what they have done for years? Moreover, as many have pointed out (e.g., Fiske, 1991; Shanker, 1990), the traditional practice of teaching does not require teachers to engage in the kinds of behaviors associated with decision-making. Do they really know how to run a school?

This kind of skepticism about teachers' capabilities is what caused administrators to withhold teachers' decision-making power in the first place. But the conventional approach to teaching low-achieving students did not originate with teachers; they, like others, can adopt a different set of expectations and

devise more diverse and comprehensive strategies. However, in order for them to do so, they also need opportunities for planning, learning, and staff development. While some accounts of restructuring schools suggest that teachers have immediately devised better approaches, it is reasonable to assume that in most cases a significant amount of time will be needed to set the new decision-making structures in place–and even longer for them to make a difference. Indeed, a number of restructuring proposals contain staff development and training for teachers as part of the package.

Fourth, developing a vision, or mission, for the school is a necessary ingredient in shared decision-making if it is to have a significant pay-off for students at risk. In consensus goal-setting, all staff can jointly develop and adhere to a common vision for the school and its students. For example, when a school decides that all students will be successful in the regular program of study, teachers and administrators begin to think differently about how the school is organized and the types of programs they should provide. Levin's Accelerated Schools Program (Levin, 1988) stresses high expectations and frequent monitoring of progress using three basic principles: (1) the school sets a unity of purpose; (2) the school site is empowered to make decisions; and (3) the school builds on the strengths of students, teachers, parents, and community. The *expectation* in the Accelerated Schools–that all students in the school will achieve grade-level proficiency by sixth grade–becomes a common principle for the school as it develops new programs and makes changes.

Changes in Connections with the Community

The second dimension of restructuring addresses the broader context of children's lives and those of their families. Schools and communities are experimenting with ways to increase interagency collaboration and coordination of community resources. This dimension of restructuring also addresses issues related to parental involvement, youth employment programs, as well as parent satisfaction and school choice, and the responsiveness of the school to "market" demand (Elmore, 1990).

As the diversity of students' needs grows, integrating school and social services for children becomes increasingly important (Gardner, 1989; G.P. Guthrie & L.F. Guthrie, 1991; Melaville & Blank, 1991). Many community-school groups have set up procedures for periodic networking and information-sharing, and a few have gone beyond dividing responsibilities to reconceptualize the role

of the school and social services agencies (G.P. Guthrie & L.F. Guthrie, 1991). They have begun to craft new school-community systems that cut through the red tape and territorial feelings to place the client as the central focus of interlocking services (Hodgkinson, 1989).

Collaboration can be approached in at least four ways (L.F. Guthrie & Scott, 1991). A case manager within the school district might coordinate services of several agencies for children and their families; agencies might co-locate services at a central location, such as the school; agencies and the schools might rely on frequent meetings and exchange of information to stay informed about policies, programs, and clients; or an advocacy group might work as a broker to meet identified needs.

New Beginnings, a collaborative effort of the City of San Diego, County of San Diego, San Diego City Schools, San Diego Community College District, and the San Diego Housing Commission, seeks to change fundamentally the way in which services are delivered. As a demonstration, a school-based service delivery model has been developed at one school site to provide (1) a cadre of Family Services advocates that provide ongoing services; (2) connections to an Extended Team of supportive services providers at participating agencies; (3) improved registration and assessment of children and their families; (4) parent education and adult education classes; and (5) expanded services.

Another example is Comer's School Development Program (Comer, 1988), in which each school organizes a (1) a mental health team (social worker, psychologist, special education teacher) that serves a case management function for the most needy children; (2) a governance and management group (principal, mental health team member, teacher, and parents) that plans, identifies resources, and implements new programs; (3) a parent program in which parents act as classroom aides and serve on the governance group; and (4) a curriculum and staff development component.

CHANGES IN THE PROCESS OF SCHOOLING

The third dimension of restructuring, the *changes in the process of schooling*, rests on the assumption that schools should be reorganized so that they can accommodate the best-known approaches to teaching and learning as they become available. Elmore (1990) refers to this aspect of restructuring as the "core technology" of schooling. Newmann (1991) describes it as changing

students' experiences. In either case, the types of reforms considered include new ways of organizing curriculum and instruction, alternatives for grouping students, and alternatives in the location and time allocated for instruction.

For changes in the process of schooling to have a substantial effect on students at risk, we must assume that decision-making has been decentralized and that school staff are in a position to implement the various organizational changes that have been recommended. Otherwise, altering the class schedule or providing alternative locations for classes are simply more projects and not part of a whole.

Curriculum and instruction. If we accept the idea that every child has the potential to carry out sophisticated reasoning and problem-solving, then it is evident that traditional approaches to educating disadvantaged students are inadequate. Remedial approaches tend to underestimate students' capabilities and postpone more challenging work for too long. Curriculum and instructional strategies need not be locked into rigid learning hierarchies; instead, educators should balance routine and more complex tasks and build on students' knowledge and experience (Knapp & Turnbull, 1990). How can schools be restructured so that instead of a steady diet of worksheets and drill, even low-achieving students are introduced to materials that lead them toward more advanced learning activities and complex ideas? How do restructuring plans improve student access to a quality curriculum and interesting courses that allow them to acquire advanced skills?

Strategies such as various types of tutoring, cooperative learning, and computer-assisted instruction represent some ways to reorganize instruction and offer students greater opportunities to learn. While each of these approaches is different, they have in common certain advantages for at-risk students. For one thing, they offer more individualized instruction that allows for flexibility in the pace of learning. The one-on-one reading instruction that is part of tutoring programs like Reading Recovery (Clay, 1985) and Reciprocal Teaching (Palinscar & Brown, 1984) allows teachers to anticipate students' needs, maintain student engagement, and ultimately gives low-performing children a chance to catch up.

Computer-assisted instruction is another way to individualize instruction and provide all students the opportunity to succeed. Although most commercial programs rely almost exclusively on the computer's capacity for managing drill

and practice, some researchers have been experimenting with ways to accelerate low-achievers' learning (Bransford, 1987).

Second, these approaches offer a variety of instructional strategies that can be tailored to the needs of individual students or groups of students. They respond to students' diverse needs. In Reciprocal Teaching, for instance, the teacher coaches a student through successful reading strategies, gradually shifting the responsibility for reading to the student (Garcia & Pearson, 1990).

Third, cooperative learning and peer tutoring give at-risk youngsters an opportunity to interact with a broader range of children (D.W. Johnson & R.T. Johnson, 1990; Slavin & Madden, 1989). Some peer tutoring approaches, for example, match junior high school tutors with elementary school students. In cooperative learning, students with a range of achievement levels work together.

Finally, there is a trend toward introducing programs with a more preventive approach. Instead of waiting until students are several grade levels behind, schools are searching for ways to intervene early and thus reduce the need for additional help later on. At the elementary school level, supplemental resources have been concentrated in whole-day Kindergartens (Slavin, Karweit, & Madden, 1989), or invested in programs like Reading Recovery (Clay, 1985), mentioned above. Because many of today's families are unable to provide the kinds of early childhood education experiences that children need, preschool programs are also receiving added attention (Karweit, 1989; Natriello et al., 1990).

Grouping practices. Homogeneous grouping by ability and rigid tracking are being questioned, if not eliminated (L.F. Guthrie & Leventhal, 1985; Oakes, 1986). An important consequence of holding high expectations for all students is that the schools begin to provide low-achieving students greater access to quality curriculum and instruction. Schools are looking for ways to provide all students the "core" curriculum and discontinue remedial, "dumping ground" courses.

Several advocates of restructuring have recommended reorganizing the comprehensive high school into smaller units (Goodlad, 1983; Natriello et al., 1990) so that students and teachers can get to know each other better. These "self-contained" teaching teams, "houses," or "schools-within-a-school" promote interaction and communication between teachers and students and among peers. A closer association with students at risk also enables teachers design

instructional strategies and curriculum innovations that more readily meet students' needs. In the high school academies model, (L.F. Guthrie, G.P. Guthrie, & van Heusden, 1990), students study an academic curriculum linked with a specific profession, e.g., medicine, journalism, or banking, over three years with the same cohort of students. Classes are small, and strong bonds with the teachers and other students inevitably develop. Middle schools in Jefferson County Schools, Louisville, Kentucky, were reorganized into mini-schools of approximately 150 students each (David, 1989). Led by a team of five teachers, each mini-school has decision-making power over curriculum and instruction, materials, and scheduling. Many of the same outcomes of the academies are reported for mini-schools in terms of group dynamics and collegiality among teachers.

Alternative locations and use of time. As a response to student diversity, many schools are looking for ways to provide services in locations other than the regular school building. Churches, community centers, health clinics, and local businesses may be settings where alienated students feel more comfortable (Finn, 1991). Reducing program size promotes engagement in academic tasks (Institute for Educational Leadership, 1986; Wehlage et al., 1989), allows students more "quality contact" with each other, and leads to closer relationships with teachers (CED, 1987; Orr, 1987). Field trips provide opportunities for learning outside the school.

Many of the restructuring proposals also include modification in the use of time. In secondary programs and alternative schools, students are given an alternative to the rigid schedules of most high schools. The instructional day is not always neatly cut into 50-minute periods; instead, laboratories are linked with science classes, and journalism is merged with English. Options for extending the time of the regular school day or year give at-risk students an opportunity to catch up with higher-achieving peers. Long Beach, California, for example, offers lessons before and after school, on Saturdays, during the summer, and in intersession at year-round schools (L.F. Guthrie, G.P. Guthrie, van Heusden, & Burns, 1989). Some of the other strategies for using time include year-round schools, flexible starting times, multi-age grouping, options for more (or less) than twelve years of schooling (Fiske, 1991), and school-within-a-school programs, which block-program students through more than one class period.

Each of the alternatives mentioned above has a potential for improving the educational outcomes of at-risk students. They are all based upon the

assumption that every student can learn and succeed; in addition, they respond to diversity through offering alternatives to students, either in term of group size, location, and instructional strategy.

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CONCLUSION

Improving educational outcomes for students at risk–like educational reform in general–will happen at the local school site. The school is the unit of change and improvement–not the program or project (Sirotnik, 1990). This is not to say that larger units, such as the district, or particular within-school projects are irrelevant, only that the school as a unit needs to be recognized. Thus, it is critically important that those concerned with improving educational outcomes for students at risk consider proposals on the restructuring agenda, regardless of which definition of "restructuring" one may accept (e.g., Olson, 1988).

While there are, in fact, no proven models, several of the ideas associated with restructuring have an excellent potential for improving the schooling of at-risk youngsters, but continued experimentation, refinement, and cross-fertilization are needed.

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